

VICE PRESIDENT'S OPENING STATEMENT TO THE TASK FORCE
(Press will be present)

I want to welcome you all to the first meeting of the Task Force on Combatting Terrorism. The main purpose of this session is to get the project underway, and to cover certain organizational aspects of the Task Force.

I want you to know the President is dead serious about ensuring that our capabilities to combat terrorism are the best that this country's resources can provide. We have to be committed in the fight against terrorism. I, like all Americans, was profoundly affected by the brutal murder of Robert Stethem. Sadly, his death during the TWA hijacking was not an isolated incident. Several days later, our marines in El Salvador were murdered by other terrorists. The United States has become the prime target of terrorists throughout the world. Americans have been the victim of a terrorist onslaught for over a decade, and this onslaught is continuing. I am fed up with terrorist violence; indeed all Americans are outraged at this modern scourge. Terrorism must have a consequence. International terrorism requires an international response.

In the past several years, we have made great progress in combatting terrorism. People in every Department represented here have done an outstanding job. But, we want to be sure that what we have today makes best use of national assets available to combat terrorism.

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The President has directed me to chair a government-wide Task Force on Combatting Terrorism. The particulars of this Task Force are contained in a Presidential Directive, which you have before you. The objective of this Task Force is to review and evaluate the effectiveness of US policy and programs to combat terrorism and to make recommendations to the President for action. The review and evaluation will include an assessment of national priorities, the assignment of responsibility and accountability for ensuring interagency cooperation and coordination before, during and after a terrorist incident, the review and evaluation of present laws, the adequacy of public awareness, provisions for funding and personnel, and the evaluation of current levels of programs of international cooperation and coordination.

There are a whole host of issues embedded in these key areas. Those agencies responsible need to ferret out and debate the issues, brainstorm new ideas, prepare options, and make recommendations on how we should proceed.

That is our mandate for the next several months. I envision the final report of this Task Force to be a set of recommendations for the President, which will include policy, procedures and resources with a clear definition of the agency responsibilities within the government for each element of the program, and a long-range plan of legislative and budget actions required to accomplish and sustain our objectives in the fight against terrorism.

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I do not envision this Task Force as becoming involved in the operational aspects of any terrorist incident that might occur during our tenure. The Task Force may not have an answer for the next terrorist incident. We are not a crisis management group. Of course, we will follow the developments in any such incidents closely but for the main purpose of using the experience to assist us in the development of current, long-range comprehensive plans for dealing with the problem.

I have appointed Admiral James L. Holloway to be the Executive Director of this Task Force.

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